

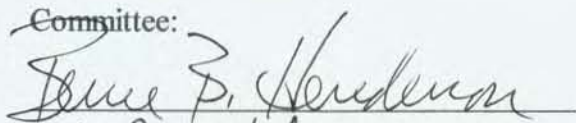
HUMAN NATURE PHILOSOPHIES AND PREFERENCES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL  
THEORIES

By

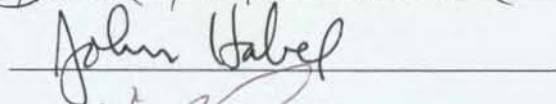
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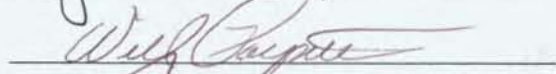
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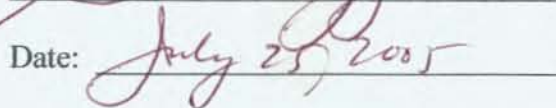
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# HUMAN NATURE PHILOSOPHIES AND PREFERENCES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

By

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(June 2005)

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## List of Abbreviations

HNQ.....	Human Nature Questionnaire
PTQ.....	Psychological Theories Questionnaire
DQ.....	Demographic Questionnaire
EP.....	Evolutionary Psychology
N.....	Neutral
E.....	Evil
G.....	Good
U.....	Unchangeable
C.....	Changeable
NU.....	Nurture
NA.....	Nature
D.....	Determinism
F.....	Freewill
P.....	Pessimism
O.....	Optimism

## Abstract

### HUMAN NATURE PHILOSOPHIES AND PREFERENCES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

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The differences in individual perspectives among college freshmen on both their view of human nature and their personal preferences for psychological theories were investigated in this study. A questionnaire (HNQ) measuring human nature viewpoints was used to determine, for example, individual standpoints on human nature. The following human nature dimensions were used in this study: evil/good, unchangeable/changeable, nurture/nature, determinism/freewill, and pessimism/optimism. Scenarios presenting a behavior followed by five explanations for that behavior were used to measure students' preferences for psychological theories. Each of the five explanations represented the following psychological theorists and theories used in this study: Skinner, evolutionary psychological theory, Freud, Maslow, and Kelly. It was hypothesized that individuals who prefer a particular psychological theorist (e.g., Freud, Skinner, etc.) or theory (evolutionary psychological theory) would show similar preferences as that theorist on the five human nature dimensions used in this study (see Table 1).

A student who believes that people are generally good, that behaviors and traits are changeable, that behaviors and traits are environmentally influenced, that people can choose their behaviors and traits, and a student who has an optimistic viewpoint about humanity would prefer Maslow's theory.

The results of this study revealed significant correlations between the nurture/nature dimension and the evolutionary psychological theory, indicating that students who believe that biology determines behaviors and traits prefer the evolutionary psychological theory. None of the other human nature dimensions and psychological theories showed significant correlations. The results of this study also revealed inconsistencies in students' responses to the HNQ and PTQ, which present difficulties in interpreting the results. Nonetheless, the pessimism/optimism dimension demonstrated marginally consistent responses, as well as Freud's psychological theory.



## Chapter I

### Introduction and Literature Review

Humans have certain assumptions about how the world functions, such as the assumption that people can change their own environments and their own situations. Other world assumptions include such ideas about determinism/freewill or evil/good. These assumptions are thought to be metaphysical in nature and, thus, unable to undergo empirical validation. Actually, these assumptions can be indirectly researched through questionnaires and responses to scenarios that tap into the basic ideas comprising these core assumptions. For example, questionnaires can include true or false items as “people tell the truth” or “people choose good deeds over evil ones.” Scenarios present a human behavior, such as stealing a candy bar, and theoretical explanations for engaging in that particular behavior, “he stole a candy bar for attention.” Metaphysical assumptions are embedded in psychological theories. These assumptions can be found in the ideas of such major psychological theorists as B. F. Skinner, Sigmund Freud, George Kelly, Abraham Maslow, and evolutionary psychological theorists such as David Buss. In the past, research revealed little insight into the propositions about a good or evil nature, for example.

Currently, most researchers and psychological theorists also ignore the metaphysical assumptions in research because they believe that these assumptions are not capable of experimental investigation.



Nonetheless, assumptions about why humans behave as they do pose interesting questions. Are ordinary human metaphysical assumptions about human nature consistent with those revealed in psychological theories? Can consistencies be reliably identified? There is currently very little research that answers these questions directly.

### *General History of Theories on Human Nature*

The idea of human nature has a long history, beginning even before the time of the ancient Greeks. In fact, the ancient Greek philosophers considered human nature to be comprised of attributes, qualities, and properties that enabled humans to exert certain actions. The ancient Greeks assumed that causal links existed between the intrinsic characteristics and attributes of human nature and the behaviors that identify these human qualities (Wrightsmann, 1992). One example is Plato. Plato's theory assumed human beings are dependent on their environment, yet he recognized that human beings have an intrinsic core, as well, that provides personalities and personal beliefs. Plato's theory recognized that humanity needs interactions with nature in order to provide sufficient resources for survival, such as water to drink and food to eat. Plato's theory also supported that idea that humans have natural tendencies to be around other human beings for social interaction and communication (Wrightsmann); it is through these social interactions and relationships with other human beings that shape individual personalities and attributes. According to Greek philosophers such as Plato humans pursue certain behaviors because of their natural and intrinsic tendencies, as well as because of external factors that govern their behaviors, such as friendships, relationships, hunger, and thirst.

Another individual whose theoretical ideas circuitously address the human nature issue is Charles Darwin. Darwin was an evolutionary biologist who studied animal behavior. In his studies, Darwin indirectly touched on the pessimistic dynamics in human nature, particularly the selfish qualities and competitive traits that animals seem to possess for survival purposes. He observed animals in their own environments, glimpsing animals and organisms as they really are in nature, without cultural and societal influences (Schwartz, 1986). According to Darwin, all species differ in their capacities, abilities, and mechanisms for survival. That is, some species are better survivors than others, successfully competing for food and mates. Those without such advantages serve as prey and eventually become extinct, ridding nature of species with maladaptive characteristics that lead to death. Those who survive and produce offspring then evolve into better, more adaptable species (Schwartz).

Even pre-Darwinian research, when no theory existed to explain evolutionary mechanisms, suggests that life is changeable, which was demonstrated through fossil records and species comparisons (Buss, 1999). That is, biologists studied and found similarities in the structure of humans, orangutans, chimpanzees, and other animal species (e.g., all have five fingers and toes), as well as wing and flipper similarities between birds and seals, suggesting that some adaptation ensued, providing evolution and change. Furthermore, embryological development was also studied in various species, and such studies found that a pattern of arteries near the bronchial slits are present in frog, bird, and mammal embryos (Buss, 1999).



The pessimistic and deterministic ideas regarding selfishness and competitiveness appear to indeed impact viewpoints on human nature. Biologically, humans seek those activities, opportunities, and situations that satiate their self-interests and quench their own personal desires. For example, human beings have natural sexual instincts for reproductive purposes, resulting in offspring and genetic continuation; these sexual instincts provide the biological means for producing more human beings. Therefore, such self-interests and competitiveness are the only means to ensure the survival of his/her genes; this selfishness is genetically-programmed within the human species, and natural selection ensures that it extends across generations (Schwartz, 1986).

Similarly, even economic theories propose pessimistic and changeable ideas regarding humanity; they propose that it is human nature to stimulate a competitive economy because competition and self-interest are components of innate human tendencies (Schwartz, 1986). For example, economist Adam Smith argues for a competitive free market that parallels humanity's basic nature—competition (Schwartz). The more competitive the market, the more likely that particular market will survive and continue to grow and be productive and efficient. Smith sees human beings as creatures out to survive and maintain status quo without considering emotions or feelings. This idea poses that humans are selfish, competitive creatures desiring only what will make them stronger, more adapted, and better, which is a similar perspective to that of evolutionary psychology and Sigmund Freud.

### *Human Nature Assumptions and Psychological Theories*

The ideas presented regarding human nature are embedded within psychological theories, such as in Maslow's theory, Freud's theory, Skinner's theory, Kelly's theory, and the evolutionary psychological theory. Specific details about these important psychological theories will be discussed more in the following pages. The next few paragraphs present a general idea regarding these theories.

Psychological theorists' viewpoints about human nature vary widely. In fact, some evolutionary theories contain the underlying assumption that individual human make-up is genetically-programmed, with the genes being passed from one generation to the next (Lickliter & Honeycutt, 2003; Nisbett, 1990). Some theories also emphasize that environmental influences shape human development and evolution (Lickliter & Honeycutt; Buss, 1999). Other evolutionary psychological theories integrate the history of cognitive information-processing mechanisms in the brain, as well as natural selection and other biological, sociological, and psychological concepts (Buss, 2004). These theories focus on the mind/brain mechanisms, including the neurological functions of the brain and the environmental factors that affect human behavior (Buss, 1999). From an environmental and developmental standpoint, humans evolved internal psychological mechanisms, such as language, cognitive abilities, emotions, and social skills as individuals formed social groups to ensure the survival of their species (Buss, 1999). From an ancestral standpoint, survival was both important for reproduction purposes yet difficult to attain because of the competition of one species with another. Because of the genetic influences on behaviors and the biological drive for reproduction, the



evolutionary psychological standpoint appears to play into determinism and the unchangeability of behaviors, in that it depicts human nature as controlled by both genes and the environment (Buss, 1999).

Similarly, the psychoanalytic viewpoint on human nature is that it is inborn and unchangeable. As cited in Smith (2001), from Freud's viewpoint, human nature is driven by instincts, yet hindered by social order. According to Freud, the superego, or third component of the psychic structure, serves as the moral element and suppresses the self-seeking gratification from the first component of the psychic structure, the id. Freud termed the special energy form that all organisms possess as the libido. Because of this libidinous energy, humans have sexual and aggressive needs that are innate and independent from the environment (Smith). Because of these innate sexual and aggressive needs, nothing a person does is accidental or without purpose.

However, humanistic theories present a more phenomenological perspective, emphasizing both the uniqueness within every individual and their ability to determine their own future. Within this context, they also take the viewpoint that human beings are naturally good and that they generally move toward stimulating their potential and increasing possibilities and opportunities in life (Carver & Scheier, 2000). All human beings are innately good beings with both the potential and the ability to develop into well-rounded, successful, and influential people.

Although Kelly did not define his theories as engaging cognitive psychological concepts, his ideas seem to reflect such perceptions (Carver & Scheier, 2000). He combines both psychoanalytic and behaviorist concepts in his personal-construct theory

(Holland, 1970; Wrightsman, 1992); because of his personal-construct theory, he influenced cognitive psychology. Kelly's theory emphasizes that individuals are "constantly seeking an understanding of our world. To do this, each person develops a set of constructs that he or she refines and revises; these constructs serve as terms by which the person organizes and describes the world" (Wrightman, p. 42). Individuals are responsible for how they perceive the world; they choose and revise their constructs in order to make their personal view of the world more understandable and more predictable (Wrightman). That is, human beings construct their own view of human nature based upon their personal experiences with the environment. These experiences and perceptions are stored in memory and shape the way in which one thinks about and reacts to situations in the future; this idea develops from human needs to understand and predict the world around them (Carver & Scheier). For example, individuals hold different opinions about the plots of movies. One individual may construe the plot of a movie as intellectual, while another may define the plot of the movie as unsophisticated and dull.

These examples of various psychological assumptions about human nature from psychological theorists' perspectives draw from metaphysical assumptions, about determinism/freewill, unchangeable/changeable, evil/good, pessimism/optimism, and nurture/nature. That is, each of the aforementioned psychological theorists includes these dimensions of human nature within their theories about human nature. Each of these sets of metaphysical assumptions will be discussed below.



### *Determinism/Freewill*

Freewill can best be described as internal, intrinsic control over the external environment. That is, individuals who believe in freewill feel that they both control and direct their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors without help from environmental stimulation or some innate force (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976). Thus, this internal freedom is subjective merely because it lies within an individual, which makes it more difficult to measure and validate (Hjelle & Ziegler).

Determinism falls along the opposite end of the dimension. Determinism can be described as external control over thoughts, actions, and feelings. Individuals who believe in determinism do not believe that individuals are free to choose their own behaviors. Instead, they believe that individuals are controlled by the environment. For example, a determinist believes that Bob tells a joke because he receives some environmental stimulation from telling the joke. However, a person who believes in freewill believes that Bob tells jokes because he wants to; it is Bob's internal control over his thoughts and actions that causes him to tell jokes. Therefore, an individual who believes that behavior is controlled by internal freedom would fall on the freewill end of the dimension (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976).

Most psychological theorists' views on human nature also appear to stress either determinism or freewill. That is, Maslow, Freud, Skinner, Kelly, and evolutionary psychological theorists all included some idea about determinism and freewill in their theories on human personalities, attributes, and qualities. For instance, Maslow emphasizes individual control over experiences; individuals are free to choose their

future (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976). From Maslow's standpoint, humans have individual freewill to do what they desire; their behaviors are not determined by external forces, such as the environment, but, rather, their actions are controlled by intrinsic forces that determine how they will act and react in situations. For example, Maslow would assume that Bob tells a joke because he wants to tell the joke for others to enjoy. Maslow also assumes that as individuals mature into childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, they move into individuality, choosing their own character, attributes, and destinies, thus demonstrating freewill and their own internal strength and power (Hjelle & Ziegler).

Freud's theory views human nature as driven by unconscious, innate instincts that are independent from the environment (Smith, 2001). Freud believes that every action, thought, or emotion has a purpose; biological laws govern human nature and lead to survival (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976). Unconscious instincts pressure individuals to perform certain actions (Wrightsmann, 1992). Therefore, from Freud's theoretical perspective, human nature includes those instinctual pressures and urges within a person, which either work together or are in competition with one another (Carver & Scheier, 2000). These biological drives and instincts determine individual behavior, causing the person to act in ways that lead to survival. Thus, Freud's view of human nature is deterministic. That is, his theory assumes that these controlling forces, such as innate drives and desires for growth and development, determine one's behavior. For instance, Freud argues that an individual who acts aggressively is unconsciously living out the death instinct, meaning he/she is being controlled by unconscious and innate desires to return to the lifeless state from which he/she originally came (Carver & Scheier). Although Freud recognized the



illusory concept of freewill, he still believed that internal freedom and choosing between behaviors presents a false impression of the true deterministic nature of humanity. Hjellev and Ziegler (1976) even note that such examples as Freudian slips and forgetting familiar names are examples of unconscious forces determining human behavior.

Skinner's theory recognizes that humans control their behavior through reinforcement patterns (Skinner, 1971; Wrightsman, 1992). That is, Skinner's theory identifies that individuals cannot internally control their thoughts, actions, and feelings. Instead, these emotions, cognitions, and behaviors are controlled by the environmental patterns that reinforce them. For instance, Skinner would assume that Bob tells a joke because he is being reinforced for telling the joke; the students laugh at the joke, telling him that his joke is funny, drawing attention to him. Therefore, Skinner's theory assumes that human behaviors are determined by external forces, or reinforcements learned from past experiences (Skinner). According to Skinner, individuals do not choose what behaviors in which they will engage; instead, reinforcement patterns mold an individual's behavior and determine their actions (Hjellev & Ziegler, 1976).

Kelly's theory assumes that humans construe their own perceptions of the world based on personal constructs that they mentally formulate throughout lifetime experiences. Thus, individuals have control over the types of constructs that they form and store in memory. He sees humans as unique individuals, responsible for their own behavior and having some free will to decide their own actions (Wrightsman, 1992). Kelly gives individuals responsibility for choosing their own behaviors and reactions, as well as viewpoints about those behaviors (Wrightsman). Nonetheless, Kelly also

indicated that circumstances place limitations on an individual's destiny, preventing an individual from engaging in certain behaviors (Kelly, 1970). This quotation reveals that Kelly's theory perceives deterministic features (e.g., genes, biological composition) to play some role in behavioral and cognitive outcomes. Although his theory recognizes the significance of freewill, it appears that this theory also considers the significance that pre-determined circumstances have on thoughts, actions, and attributes. In some ways, it appears that Kelly's theory supports both freewill and deterministic assumptions.

Most evolutionary psychologists suggest that human beings have a determined program, both genetically-based and environmentally-based, that controls their actions and behaviors. As previously stated, evolutionary psychological theories indicate that humans evolved language, cognitions, emotions, and socialization because of genetic influences (Buss, 1999). Therefore, the evolutionary psychological standpoint appears to take a more deterministic approach to understanding human nature, in that it depicts humans as controlled by both genes and the environment (Buss).

In summary, the determinism/freewill dimension presents a continuum in which individuals believe that cognitions, feelings, and actions are controlled by the environment or believe they have the freedom to choose their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

### *Unchangeable/Changeable*

This dimension refers to the degree to which an individual's attributes, traits, qualities, and behaviors can change throughout his/her lifetime (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976). This issue questions whether basic change in thoughts, actions, emotions, and behaviors



are necessary for the development of opinions and behaviors. Can an individual change his/her mind about particular matters, such as whether or not to spread gossip? Or, are thoughts and behaviors fixed and static, incapable of malleability (Hjelle & Ziegler)?

Carol Dweck and her colleagues have identified two implicit personality theories about how individuals perceive personal attributes and traits. In one viewpoint, entity theorists believe that people have unchangeable, fixed traits and characteristics; they have a static view of human implicit assumptions, and they see any deviations from those assumptions as incorrect information that needs to be forgotten or replaced with information that more readily supports their initial assumptions (Plaks, Stroessner, Dweck, & Sherman, 2001). In contrast, incremental theorists believe that people's characteristics and traits are changeable; they see individual attributes and traits as dynamic and dependent upon environmental forces or situational variables, such as mood or emotional state. Incremental theorists assume that human assumptions about personality, individual traits, or beliefs are changeable and adaptable, depending upon their environment (Plaks et al.). It may then be assumed that entity theorists may be more likely to make stereotypical judgments about behavior than incremental theorists (Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998). Even when given the same information about stereotypes, not only do entity theorists still believe those stereotypes more than incremental theorists, but they also make those judgments immediately and with little information (Levy et al.). In fact, entity theorists may make their judgments about individuals' personalities and their behavior based on simply one encounter (Chiu, Hone, & Dweck, 1997). That is, they formulate their opinions and judgments of an individual's personality and behavior

from first impressions. Entity theorists tend to rely more heavily on traits in order to understand individuals and their behavior patterns (Erdley & Dweck, 1993). Entity theorists also evaluate incoming information about an individual more closely than incremental theorists and they code and store both positive and negative information about that individual separately in order for entity theorists to have more efficient trait diagnoses to make their judgments (Hong, Dweck, & Sacks, 1997). Therefore, the type of implicit personality theory (either entity or incremental) that an individual supports and holds may explain why entity and incremental theorists form different impressions about the same individuals (Hong et al.). It may also suggest why individuals continue to support their own assumptions about human nature.

Dweck and her colleagues' studies provide support for both changeable and static assumptions for an individual's behavior. However, what do psychological theorists such as Maslow, Freud, Skinner, Kelly, and evolutionary psychological theorists assume about the changeability of human nature? Maslow presents, in Dweck and her colleagues' terms, a more incremental viewpoint. According to Maslow, individuals are always striving for personal growth and personal fulfillment in order to become self-actualized, or the best they can be (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976; Maslow, 1968); individuals are free to choose their own actions and behaviors. Maslow presents personal growth as a need hierarchy upon which individuals climb throughout his/her lifetime. This hierarchy consists of several steps to reach the peak, which is self-actualization. The more basic needs include physiological needs for survival, such as food, air, and water (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Maslow). Also, basic needs include safety and physical security needs,



such as shelter from the weather. The next step up the hierarchy includes needs for love and belongingness, such as friendships, affection, and acceptance from other individuals. Further up the hierarchical ladder includes esteem needs, as well as the needs for power, accomplishment, appreciation, and positive self-evaluation. These esteem needs are acquired through interactions with other people and through general efforts to obtain success, whether in one's occupation or in relationships with others. The peak of the hierarchy is self-actualization. According to Maslow, self-actualization is the final step on the hierarchical ladder; humans reach this final step only when the basic, more primitive needs, such as shelter and physiological needs, are met (Carver & Scheier; Maslow). Therefore, once an individual's basic needs are met, he/she can plan his/her own destiny, or the type of individual that he/she wishes to become (Hjelle & Ziegler; Maslow).

As humans climb their way to self-actualization, growing and taking new paths in life while maintaining their basic needs, certain attitudes, attributes, traits, and behaviors change, as well. For instance, such individuals become capable of making their own choices about everyday matters, such as career, as well as moral values, such as loyalty to a spouse or friends. Certain opinions and behaviors may change as a result of this personal growth toward self-actualization. Therefore, Maslow's theory recognizes that trait and behavior changes are dynamic and necessary for an individual to reach his/her highest motive (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976; Maslow, 1968).

Freud's theory portrays these human traits, behaviors, cognitions, and actions as static, or fixed (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976). These characteristics become fixed during

childhood experiences and as children progress through the psychosexual stages of development. These psychosexual stages of development include the oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital stages, and individuals can become fixated in either the oral, the anal, or the phallic stages, such that they never progress to the next stage of psychosexual development.

Since Freud's theory assumes that these psychosexual stages are so important for human behavior and functioning, what happens developmentally and behaviorally during these stages? The first stage, the oral stage includes oral stimulation, such as sucking, and involves the lips, throat, and the mouth; this stage typically involves infants from birth to 18 months who depend upon parents for food (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Scharf, 2001). According to Freud, an individual who remains fixated in this stage throughout adulthood typically becomes preoccupied with behaviors such as eating, drinking, smoking, nail biting, and being verbally aggressive (Carver & Scheier). The second stage is the anal stage. During the anal stage, children develop bowel control and engage in toilet training. However, if conflicts with toilet training arise between parent and child, then the child can become fixated in this stage. Freud's theory also assumes that individuals fixated in this stage throughout adulthood tend to engage in behaviors such as stinginess, stubbornness, orderliness, and cleanliness (Carver & Scheier). The third stage is the phallic stage. Fixation in the phallic stage can result from castration anxiety with boys and penis envy with girls. Male children may fear that their penis will be removed, and female children may fear that they have lost their penis (Scharf). Freud theorizes that individuals who remain fixated in this stage throughout their adult life engage in



behaviors that include seduction, obtaining success, and being competitive (Carver & Scheier). The fourth stage of psychosexual development is the latency stage. In the latency stage puberty is taking place and sexual energy is channeled toward peers, sports, and hobbies. Thus, the latency stage is not included in the psychosexual stage of development, nor is the genital stage, where individuals focus their energy on the opposite sex (Carver & Scheier; Scharf). Because Freud's theory sees individuals as fixated in either the oral, anal, or phallic stages of development, it assumes that human traits, attributes, and behaviors are unchangeable. In other words, Freud assumes that once behaviors are learned, they are static (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976).

Unlike Freud's theory, Skinner's theory presumes that behavior is dynamic (Ferster & Skinner, 1957; Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976). That is, he believed that human actions change throughout their lifetime as a result of environmental variations. For example, because reinforcement patterns vary in different situations, behavior patterns also vary, depending upon the presence of some reward or incentive. Skinner's theory presents that both reinforcement patterns and behaviors in which individuals engage are dynamic. In other words, behavior is controlled by reinforcements and consequences, such as rewards and punishments. These reinforcements and/or consequences are changeable. In turn, because the behaviors that an individual performs depend upon incentives, these behaviors are also capable of changing (Ferster & Skinner; Hjelle & Ziegler).

Kelly's theory also presumes that human traits, attributes, and qualities are changeable. According to Kelly's theory, individuals contain their own constructs

through which they view the world. These personal constructs are then used to predict the future actions and behaviors of both themselves and others (Carver & Scheier, 2000). Kelly's theory also presupposes that these constructs evolve over time and through experience, allowing refinement and change in those personal constructs. Kelly describes these changes in constructs as definitions and extensions (Carver & Scheier). In definitions, individuals apply their construct to an event that the construct parallels. In extension, individuals apply their construct in unfamiliar situations and events, and those personal constructs are used to fit the unfamiliar event, showing that the construct is more broadly useful than initially thought. Both definitions and extensions are important in the evolution of a construct system because both imply choices in how the constructs will be used (Carver & Scheier). That is, definitions and extensions help to predict certain situations. What happens if neither a definition nor an extension can be applied? That is, what if new situations do not fit the construct at all or what if there is no construct to which to apply the novel event? Kelly's theory assumes that a major change occurs in the construct system, altogether. For instance, suppose Pete has a "polite versus impolite" construct that is very similar to his "friendly versus unfriendly" construct. However, suppose that Pete meets David who is friendly but not polite; David may speak and talk to Pete, but he does not say "thank you" or act appreciative for the kind things that others do for David. Instead, David is friendly only because he wants others to do favors for him. Thus, Pete's constructs now prove to be unrelated. His new construct organization relates "polite versus impolite" and "manipulative versus not manipulative"



(Carver & Scheier). Therefore, Kelly theorizes that human behavior is not static, but capable of changing.

Evolutionary psychology paints a similar picture on unchangeable traits, attributes, and behaviors in human beings. That is, evolutionary psychology presents an unchangeable viewpoint on human thought patterns, actions, and emotions; cognitive processes and behaviors in humans evolve into more adaptable means for survival, but the essence (e.g., genes) of them never change. Evolutionary psychological theories assume that individual human make-up is genetically-programmed, with the genes being intergenerational, or passed from one generation to the next (Lickliter & Honeycutt, 2003; Nisbett, 1990). This idea not only implies that human behaviors and thoughts are determined at birth, but it also implies that actions, emotions, and cognitions are unable to change throughout the lifetime. However, evolutionary psychology theories do not reject environmental influences, but, rather, they include them in their theoretical assumption about human behaviors and qualities. That is, evolutionary psychologists subsume the importance of environmental influences in shaping human development and evolution, aiding in gene expression (Buss, 1999; Lickliter & Honeycutt). According to evolutionary psychology, humans are genetically programmed for survival, and the environment either helps with this survival, such as with rain for water and food, or hinders it, such as with competitors and predators. The evolutionary psychological theory recognizes that psychological mechanisms function to explain adaptive problems and occurrences throughout evolutionary history, leading to the human adaptation mechanisms today (e.g., 350-370 nm wavelengths that can be seen by the human eye)

(Buss, 1999). As stated above, humans have evolved language, cognitive abilities, emotions, and social skills in order to ensure the survival of their genes (Buss, 1999). Nonetheless, the nature of humans is still for survival and reproduction, which has not changed throughout the evolutionary process. Thus, evolutionary psychology appears to emphasize an unchangeable viewpoint on human nature.

### *Evil/Good*

The idea of evil versus good has been a predominant issue within society. For example, the main characters in movies, plays, novels, and other literature are either the “good guys” or the “bad guys.” Psychological theorists have also argued over the nature of humans, as being either inherently evil or inherently good. Existentialist Rollo May believes that the basic core of human nature is primarily evil (Martin, Blair, Nevels, & Brant, 1987; May, 1982). May argues that because humans are so influenced by culture, because individuals are so obedient to orders, and because humans are so molded by the environment, evil inevitably exists within human nature (May). May further states that “the evil in our culture is also the reflection of evil in ourselves, and vice versa,” identifying the presence of evil and implying that an evil nature affects more than just one individual.

Empirical evidence supporting May’s view is provided by Milgram’s studies. Milgram’s results suggest that human nature may be motivated by the intrinsic conflict between forces of evil and forces of good. Milgram’s studies reveal that despite an individual’s perception of pain and suffering being inflicted upon an innocent victim, obedience to authority still determines their responses to the victim. As a universal truth,



most children learn from parents or guardians that harming another person goes against the moral code ingrained in society. According to one Milgram study (1963), participants acknowledged this truth, yet they continued to punish the “victim” with electric shock. These victims protested the punishment, stating their distress and discomfort, yet the participants continued to inflict punishment upon the victim, even increasing the severity of the punishment as instructed by the experimenter (Milgram). In fact, this experiment shows contradictions between two ingrained dispositions that most humans possess: the desire not to harm another human being and the desire to obey authority (Milgram). The dilemma arises when one of these desires must be violated for the other. In these studies, humans continued to knowingly inflict pain on others in order to keep themselves from getting in trouble with authority. This idea hints at selfishness because one wants to prevent harm on oneself, even if it means harming another individual. Such selfishness suggests that humans have evil tendencies, including protecting their own dignity no matter who is hurt.

Most humanistic theorists view human nature as essentially good. However, most psychoanalytic theories assume a more evil view of human nature. In Maslow’s theory, human nature is based on the capacity for growth and the ability to self-actualize (Wrightsmann, 1992). Humanists see humans as possessing the abilities to be successful, as well as motivated to participate in opportunities for potential intrinsic growth (Martin et al., 1987). Also, according to the humanist perspective, the environment can affect the development of an individual, either gratifying or frustrating his or her basic needs, but it can never create or change an individual’s essential nature (Gellar, 1982). According to

Maslow's theory and other humanistic theories (Gellar), evil is not a natural part of human nature, and human nature can only be neutral at the very worst (Gellar). An evil, or according to humanists, a "neutral" disposition on human nature, can only be environmentally-influenced through culture, maladaptive choices, and bad experiences (Gellar).

Freud's theory also presents an evil viewpoint on human nature. His theory views people as driven by their own pleasures, their own desires, and their own needs. For example, if Susie observes Tony eating a candy bar, and Susie wants Tony's candy bar, then Susie is likely to take the candy bar from Tony, operating on her immediate wishes that provide her with pleasure. Even in infants Freud hypothesized that infants invest their energy into the pleasure principle, or gratifying their needs (Sharf, 2001). One such example involves hunger and thirst. An infant releases all his or her energy through crying in order to receive food, gratifying his or her needs. As previously stated, Freud also hypothesized that individuals must progress through a series of psychosexual stages, in which their needs are either met or unmet. According to Freud, operating on this pleasure principle results in such characteristics as dependency, disorderliness, and sexual identity problems. Because Freud's theory assumes that human beings are driven by their own fantasies, wishes, and biological needs and because human intentions are to gain their own pleasure, Freud implies an evil assumption about human nature.

However, Skinner's theory on human nature neither denotes an evil one or a good one; he appears neutral on this dimension. Skinner's theory recognizes that human beings operate on reinforcement patterns in which behaviors are either repeated or not



repeated because of some past consequences for performing the behavior. In other words, human beings are controlled by external, environmental circumstances, not by their own personal desires or feelings (Wrightman, 1992). Nonetheless, Skinner's theoretical stance appears to have no opinion on the idea of evil or good because it assumes that human beings are not controlled by internal factors. Thus, Skinner's viewpoint on evil or good is neutral, meaning his theory rejects the issue, believing evil and good do not even exist.

Additionally, Kelly's theory presents a neutral viewpoint on the issue of human nature. As previously indicated, according to Kelly's personal construct theory, an individual possesses a cognitive system which he/she generates for explaining his or her own personal view of the world and the way in which it works (Carver & Scheier, 2000); these personal constructs help to explain other individuals' behaviors, actions, and characteristics (Sharf, 2001), and these individual worldviews are then forwarded onto the environment in order to predict future behaviors, actions, and events (Carver & Scheier). However, Kelly also theorizes that constructs are personal and unique, according to the way a particular individual views the world (Carver & Scheier; Sharf). For example, individuals may have different viewpoints on the meaning of "loud." One individual may define "loud" as speaking in such a tone of voice that an entire audience can hear the speaker without the speaker holding a microphone. Another individual may define "loud" as speaking in a slightly higher tone than the average person. Perspectives on the way one person sees another can vary widely because each individual views behaviors, attributes, and characteristics differently; none of these perspectives can be



defined as “right” or more “correct” than another (Sharf). Individuals make their own decisions when interpreting the meaning of behaviors and events (Carver & Scheier). Thus, evil or good can only be defined individually; one person may interpret certain behaviors, such as giving money to the poor, as “good” deeds, while another may define “good deeds” as raising children in a smoke-free home. Likewise, individuals have different perceptions on the idea of evil. One individual may define “evil” behaviors as drinking alcoholic beverages, while another defines “evil” behaviors as murdering another person. These various viewpoints and perspectives on qualities, traits, and features are individualized, and no individual construct is more significant than another. Therefore, Kelly’s theoretical assumptions on human nature paint a neutral picture on the idea of evil and good because evil and good behaviors are only individual interpretations of how the world works.

Evolutionary psychological theories appear to support that humans possess an evil nature. According to evolutionary psychological theorists, humans are naturally competitive creatures. As stated previously, this competition currently exists because throughout history, survival has been important for passing genes onto offspring (Carver & Scheier, 2000). Thus, good actions such as altruism prevents genes from being passed to future generations because when engaging in altruistic acts there is the chance that death can occur, resulting in termination of that genetic code; altruism can, thus, have an adaptive drawback (Carver & Scheier). In fact, in order for altruism to work, individuals within the species must be wary of those who do not return favors and to exclude such individuals from the species group, leaving them to fend for themselves (Palmer &

Palmer, 2002); those who do not reciprocate altruistic behaviors are regarded as “free-riders” and excluded from the species group in hopes that these “free-rider” genes will terminate (Evans & Zarate, 1999). As indicated previously, throughout history, competition (e.g., survival of the fittest) has also existed in mate selection, primarily for reproductive purposes. This competitive nature casts an evil aura on human nature as only the strong and fiercest survive to reproduce.

Evolutionary psychological viewpoints also suggest that aggressiveness evolved as a means of establishing power and supremacy over other males, giving males more opportunity for being selected as a mate, as well as for spreading their genes (Carver & Scheier, 2000). In males as early as age three, physical aggressiveness may be a means to obtain a specific item or items from another individual (Buss, 2004). Males typically engage in physical coercion to receive the object of desire. Evolutionary psychological theorists do not have one specific hypothesis as to why males are more physically aggressive than females. One such hypothesis includes the idea that evolutionarily human beings needed resources for survival and reproduction, such as food, water, land, and weapons. However, these resources were limited, and so males needed to be aggressive in order to obtain survival mechanisms. Thus, males needed to defend their families and resources from attack and prove their dominance through fights and physical attacks (Buss, 2004). Therefore, the idea that humans are guided by the biological desire to reproduce and spread their genes even through competitive and fatal acts presents an evil view on human nature.



### *Pessimism/Optimism*

Pessimism can be defined as having a negative perspective on most situations and behaviors and having, and optimism can be viewed as having a positive, hopeful outlook on life. Because humanists argue that humans are essentially good creatures, with moral intentions for the betterment of society, humanistic theories display optimism and buoyancy. That is, humanists present individuals in a favorable, hopeful light, which portrays all human behaviors as opportunities for growth. As indicated previously, Maslow theorizes that everyone has the capability of self-actualizing, or growing more and more into the person he or she is capable of being. Individuals possess this fundamental desire to accept themselves and other people, to appreciate nature, to respect others and their property, to be creative, to be guided by their own internal dreams and goals, and to develop close friendships with a few people, all of which are examples of self-actualized individuals (Carver & Scheier, 2000). This theory assumes that people perform behaviors because they wish to bring enjoyment to other individuals. For example, an individual may feed stray animals because she really wants to help such animals; this individual aspires to appreciate nature and help those less fortunate. The optimistic and cheerful nature that Maslow's theory assumes to exist within all individuals portrays humans with natural affinity to express themselves through goodness and vitality, creating a wholeness within them that leads to self-actualization (Gellar, 1982). Striving for self-actualization is, in fact, a sanguine and optimistic disposition because the individual possesses aspirations to reach his/her highest potential. Therefore, according to Maslow's theory, optimism appears to be an innate aspect of all humans.



Kelly's personal construct theory appears to present a neutral perspective on the optimism/pessimism dimension. As previously indicated Kelly theorizes that individuals have a need to forecast future events, so they generate personal views of the world and direct those constructs upon the environment (Carver & Scheier, 2000). The personal constructs are intrinsic and the individual interprets his or her own personal meaning of particular attributes and behaviors, and other people's behavior either supports those meanings or causes those meanings to be reconsidered and possibly revised to form new constructs to fit a particular behavior. Thus, Kelly indicates neither optimism nor pessimism in his personal construct theory.

Evolutionary psychological theories pose a pessimistic viewpoint on human nature. That is, evolutionary psychological theories appear to distinctly explain pessimism in their viewpoints on the issue of human nature. As aforementioned, evolutionary psychological theories assume human behavior to be determined by both social pressures, such as mate selection, and mental mechanisms that have evolved over time that allow an individual species to survive, reproduce, and evolve into more adaptively advantageous creatures (Buss, 2004); from an evolutionary psychological standpoint, two of the more important aspects of life include mating and parenting (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2001). Some male species even provide no support to offspring after mating, abandoning their mate and offspring. Although most human males continue to support their children, females typically provide more interaction with their children (Bjorklund & Pellegrini). Such a viewpoint on human nature, whereby females tend to

carry most of the responsibility of parenthood, supports a pessimistic outlook on human nature.

Furthermore, males tend to possess more selective pressure in reproducing with regards to their social status (Buss, 2001). In other words, females can only be impregnated by one sperm from one male in order for conception to occur and pregnancy to occur for the next nine months (if the female is human). Males have many sperm which are readily available for fertilization and reproduction. Nonetheless, social status plays a role in whether males reproduce. Males with higher social status may be preferred more by women because they offer protection and numerous resources needed to support the family, especially the children (Buss). Males who also dominate the social status are more likely to be unopposed by lower status men; the lower status men are more likely to be fearful of the dominant males and relinquish any quarrels or resources that the more powerful male demands (Buss).

Additionally, the competitive traits that humans possess also provide support for a pessimistic outlook on human nature from the evolutionary psychological standpoint. From a historical perspective, competition amongst males developed as males battled for mates who could conceive and bear children and who could then pass along their genes to future generations (Carver & Scheier, 2000). These males thrived on sexual instincts, warring against opponents in order for their genes to be passed along to future generations. Also, instinctual preference played a part in mate selection. Specifically, studies have shown that individuals may select mates based upon similar features to themselves (Carver & Scheier). For instance, a male with broad shoulders, muscular



arms, and a slender waist may prefer to mate with a female who has a curvy, hour-glass figure, because they both share socially desired male and female physical features, indicating the male's strength and endurance and the female's ability to carry children. Females with less desirable traits would not readily induce competition amongst males. Because such examples of evolutionary psychological theories present individuals as controlled by natural instincts and because these theories indicate the predominate desire for the "pretty" genes to survive, evolutionary psychology appears to carry a pessimistic viewpoint on the optimism/pessimism dimension.

### *Nurture/Nature*

Whether behaviors and traits are a result of biological, genetic influences or a result of the environment currently is a controversial topic. Is a person's behavior the work of genetics? Is a person's behavior the result of the influences of authoritative figures or society in general? Or, is behavior a combination of these two ideas? If so, to what extent? Such questions are pondered by psychologists and theorists today, with answers primarily centering on subjective opinions.

The issue of nurture/nature is present in the psychological theories presented in this study. Maslow's perspective on the nurture/nature dimension favors the significant role of nurture. As previously stated, Maslow's theory on the hierarchy of needs supports this assumption. His theoretical belief centers on environmental influences and how they shape development (Carver & Scheier, 2000). For instance, in his theory, the first need to be met is the physiological needs for food, water, and oxygen. Typically, with children, these needs are met through some form of parental care and nurture. Even in



adulthood such needs are met through grocery stores and clean water supplies. Without meeting these basic physiological needs, humans would become sick and die, suggesting humanity's dependence upon the environment. Esteem needs are achieved through positive feedback from others, increasing an individual's sense of self-worth (Carver & Sheier). The key point in these examples is that the environment plays a role in these needs, in that external influences help facilitate internal feelings of value and importance. In sum, when considering Maslow's theory on hierarchy of needs, it is important to reflect on humans' natural progression to self-actualization; it is important to consider that humans possess the capacity for growth, and that the environment helps to foster and cultivate that growth (Wrightsman, 1992).

Freud's viewpoint emphasizes the significance of nature. From Freud's perspective, development is due to biological forces that cause humans to engage in particular behaviors (Wrightsman, 1992). As previously stated, Freud's psychoanalytical theory focuses on the natural instincts, innate psychosexual stages determined through genetics and biological nature and to occur regardless of culture, and defense mechanisms (e.g., denial, repression, etc.) that are natural and internal and a part of biological instincts (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976).

Skinner's theory supports a nurture viewpoint. As aforementioned, Skinner's theory presumes that reinforcement patterns and environmental influences shape an individual's behavior (Sternberg, 2001). From Skinner's standpoint, an individual's behavior is influenced by the consequences of an action, or the reactions that society has about a particular behavior.

Kelly's theory supports a neutral perspective because, as indicated earlier, Kelly argues that individuals produce constructs about particular behaviors and events based upon their own personal experience and perception of the world (Carver & Scheier, 2000). This theory draws on both the biological nature of individual cognitive abilities and environmental influences that help shape these cognitions.

Evolutionary psychological theories appear to support a nature viewpoint. As indicated earlier, evolutionary psychological theories focus primarily on biological instincts, including species survival and reproduction, as well as brain mechanisms that underlie the processes of adaptation, aiding in survival and reproduction, as well as development (Buss, 2004). An example of the evolutionary psychological theory focus on nature involves a study that found that a dominant gene impaired 16 of 30 people in three generations of one family, producing language deficits despite normal intellectual functioning (Fisher, Vargha-Khadem, Watkins, Monaco, & Pembrey, 1998). The members of this family could not master even the simplest grammatical rules. Thus, this family suffers from a genetic condition that leaves them predisposed to language impairments.

Another example of the evolutionary psychological theory focus on nature involves altruism and the biological instinct to engage in altruism for survival and reproduction. W.D. Hamilton experimentally demonstrated that individuals within a species can enhance their own reproduction by aiding their relatives. That is, by risking one's life for other individual's within the species (by saving more than one individual in the species), individuals ensure the survival of the species (Palmer & Palmer). However,



in order for reciprocal altruism to work, individuals within the species must be wary of those who do not return favors and to exclude such individuals from the species group, leaving them to fend for themselves (Palmer & Palmer, 2002). Those who do not return favors are known as free-riders, and this problem is known as the free-rider problem, and the free-rider problem centers on the notion that the free-rider will survive while other group members deacease, passing on their free-riding genes and resulting in selfish offspring interested in their own survival and not that of the species (Evans & Zarate, 1999). Such examples support the idea that evolutionary psychological theorists appear to adhere to a nature perspective on this dimension.

#### *Statement of the Problem and Hypotheses*

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between students' views of human nature and their preferences for different psychological explanations of human behavior. This study draws on students' views about determinism and freewill, evil and good, unchangeability and changeability of behaviors, pessimistic and optimistic outlooks, and nurture and nature in assessing views of human nature differences, such aspects of what Laudan would call core assumptions of research traditions (Gholson & Barker, 1985; Laudan, 1977). These core assumptions should be consistent with the kinds of psychological explanations individuals prefer. For example, one hypothesis here is that people who perceive humans as innately good would prefer a humanistic explanation of human nature. Likewise, individuals who perceive humans as inherently evil would prefer an evolutionary psychological or Freudian explanation of human behavior.



Students enter college with certain beliefs about humankind and the functioning of the world; they may even have conceptions about causes of human behavior that contain certain ideas that conflict with their own personal assumptions (McKeachie, 1960). These students may have certain fixed beliefs that they have always possessed about psychological issues in general. They may be resistant to changing those conceptions even when introductory psychology courses teach students that those conceptions are inaccurate (McKeachie).

Further, some students may possess certain beliefs about the way the world works, but they may prefer other explanations when introduced to a situation or behavior that sounds more plausible to them. For example, suppose Jack, a college-age student, believes that an intelligent child is intelligent based upon the fact that that this child's parents have always read to her, provided her with books, given her puzzles, and positively reinforced her for engaging in intellectual activities. Then, suppose that he is presented with several explanations as to why this particular child is intelligent. Suppose that one of those explanations matches his personal beliefs, yet the others completely contradict it. Further assume that one of the explanations is an evolutionary psychological one in which human intelligence has evolved and is genetically based. Suppose he also perceives genetics as a plausible factor for intelligence. Is this student going to change his initial explanation, or is he going to retain it?

In fact, some theorists describe the various psychological theories as each being research tradition with specific assumptions about the way the world functions (Gholson & Barker, 1985). All of these research traditions contain certain core components, or

universal truths upon which all theories are based. However, each research tradition can branch further, formulating other components of its own individual theory while still maintaining those core principles (Gholson & Barker). One example of a core principle may include human nature dimensions. Each theory assumes the existence of human nature, yet within each theory lies either a viewpoint that depicts humans, for instance, as innately good, innately evil, or a combination of both. Furthermore, within the idea of human nature lay the issues of determinism/freewill, unchangeable/changeable, evil/good, and pessimism/optimism. Hochwalder (2000) conducted a study comparing the ordinary person's assumptions about the human nature dimensions such as freewill/determinism and changeable/unchangeable, with the personality theories of psychological theorists such as Freud, Skinner, Maslow, and Kelly. For relevance to the present study, Hochwalder found that the ordinary person believes that individuals are both free and changeable.

Although Hochwalder's (2000) research included nine different dimensions and ten different psychological theorists, the present study will address two of Hochwalder's dimensions—freewill/determinism and changeable/unchangeable—and four psychological theorists—Kelly, Maslow, Freud, and Skinner. The idea behind this study is that some students enter college with certain assumptions about these beliefs, believing one dimension or the other or having no viewpoint at all. For instance, within one student's view of human nature, he/she may believe that humans are not controlled by external forces such as the environment. Instead, this student may believe that he/she



controls his/her own behavior. Another student may agree more strongly with environmental control and some may have no opinion either way.

Students' views of human nature should be related to their preferences for psychological explanations of behavior. The psychological theories utilized in this study include behaviorism, humanistic psychology, cognitive, psychoanalytic, and evolutionary psychology. The assumption here is that students unknowingly have a preconceived preference for one of these psychological explanations that depicts their reasons for behaviors. For example, one student may assume that humans suffer from mental illness because of horrific past experiences which they have learned to avoid discussing or contemplating. This student may agree more strongly with a behaviorist perspective.

In this study it is assumed that students will prefer psychological explanations that best matches their own beliefs on each of the five dimensions—determinism/freewill, evil/good, unchangeable/changeable, pessimism/optimism, and nurture/nature. For example, people who assume humans have freewill, are innately good, believe in the changeability of behaviors, have an optimistic outlook about the world, and support the importance of nurture should prefer a humanist (Maslow) explanation of human nature. Likewise, individuals who assume behaviors are pre-determined, who believe humans are inherently evil or bad, who believe in the unchangeability of behaviors, who have a pessimistic outlook about the world, and who believe in the importance that nature plays in behavior should prefer either an evolutionary psychological or a Freudian explanation of human behavior.



In this study it is hypothesized that students' beliefs in human nature will correlate with their psychological explanation preferences. Specifically, it is hypothesized that similarities will exist between students' views on each of the five dimensions and their general preference for a psychological explanation as predicted in Table 1. For example, students who favor the evil dimension, the unchangeable dimension, the nature dimension, the determinism dimension, and the pessimism dimension will prefer the evolutionary psychological explanation and Freud's explanation.

It is hypothesized that students who are neutral on the evil/good dimension, meaning that they do not support either of these dimensions, who believe that behaviors and traits are changeable, who believe that the environment influences behaviors and traits, who believe that behaviors and traits are determined by external forces, and who have an optimistic viewpoint about humanity will prefer Skinnerian explanations. Likewise, it is hypothesized that students who believe that humans are generally evil, that behaviors and traits are unchangeable, that biology controls and determines behaviors and traits, and who have a pessimistic outlook about humanity will prefer the evolutionary psychological explanation and the Freudian explanation. In contrast, it is hypothesized that students who believe that people are generally good, that behaviors and traits are changeable, that the behaviors and traits are influenced by the environment, that people have freewill in choosing behaviors and traits, and who have an optimistic outlook about humanity will prefer explanations representing Maslow's views. It is hypothesized that students who have a neutral viewpoints on the evil/good, nurture/nature, and

pessimism/optimism dimensions, and who believe that behaviors and traits are changeable and determined by external forces will prefer explanations representing Kelly's views.

Table 1 shows both the dimensions used in this study and the human nature viewpoints that psychological theorists, Skinner, Maslow, Freud, evolutionary psychologists, and Kelly, present in their psychological theories. It predicts students' psychological explanation preferences based on the five dimensions presented in this study:

Table 1

*Human Nature Dimensions and Psychological Explanations*

Psychological Explanations	Human Nature Dimensions**				
	<u>E/G</u>	<u>U/C</u>	<u>NU/NA</u>	<u>D/ F</u>	<u>P/O</u>
Skinner	N	C	NU	D	O
Evolutionary Psychology	E	U	NA	D	P
Freud	E	U	NA	D	P
Maslow	G	C	NU	F	O
Kelly	N	C	N	D	N

*\*\*Abbreviation Code for the Human Nature Dimensions*

N = Neutral; E = Evil; G = Good; U = Unchangeable; C = Changeable;  
NU = Nurture NA = Nature; D = Determinism; F = Freewill; P = Pessimism;  
O = Optimism



## Chapter II

### Method

#### *Participants*

Data were collected from 118 females, 48 males, and one student who did not indicate his/her gender. These participants were between the ages of 17.0 and 26.0 years of age. Participants came from a subject pool of undergraduate general psychology courses at Western Carolina University. The participants received research credit for the class.

Of the first year students in this study, 15 were 17 years of age, 104 were 18 years of age, 26 were 19 years of age, 13 were 20 years of age, 3 were 21 years of age, 3 were 22 years of age, 1 was 23 years of age, and 2 were 26 years of age. The mean age for the males was 18 years and 18 years for the females. Fifty-two of the first year students had at least one previous psychology course, and 115 had no previous psychology courses.

Of the first year students in this study, 145 were Caucasian, eleven were African American, two were Asian American, one was Alaskan/American Indian, and two were other ethnicity.

#### *Measures*

Human Nature Questionnaire (HNQ). The purpose of the HNQ is to measure how individuals perceive human nature in the context of the following dimensions:

evil/good, unchangeable/changeable, nurture/nature, determinism/freewill, and pessimism/optimism. The evil/good dimension measures whether students perceive others to behave as having an unwholesome, selfish emotional core or a wholesome and helpful emotional core. The unchangeable/changeable dimension measures whether students view events and behaviors as being fixed and stable or instable and flexible. The nurture/nature dimension measures whether students perceive characteristics as a result of environmental influences or as a result of natural, biological occurrences (e.g., genetics). The determinism/freewill dimension measures whether students assume that choices are predetermined by some external force (e.g., a spiritual being) or whether students believe people have freedom when making personal choices or performing behaviors. The pessimism/optimism dimension measures students' beliefs about whether people believe in a negative, pessimistic humanity or whether people believe in a more hopeful, positive humanity.

The items for each dimension are presented in random order throughout the scale. There are eight items for each dimension. There is a total of forty items. On a five-point scale, students marked Agree Strongly, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Disagree Strongly (See Appendices C and D). Lower scores on students' responses for each dimension on the HNQ were arbitrarily assigned to the following dimensions: evil, unchangeable, nurture, determinism, and pessimism. Higher scores on students' responses for each dimension on the HNQ were arbitrarily assigned to the following dimensions: good, changeable, nature, freewill, and optimism. For example, students who believed that people are naturally evil had lower scores on the items comprising the good/evil

dimensions (see Appendix B), revealing a negative correlation; students who believed that people are generally good had higher scores, revealing a positive correlation.

Likewise, students who believed that behaviors are unchangeable had lower scores on the items comprising the unchangeable/changeable dimension, showing a negative correlation; students who believed that behaviors are changeable had higher scores, showing a positive correlation.

Psychological Theories Questionnaire (PTQ). The purpose of this scale is to estimate which psychological theory students prefer. Scenarios that could be interpreted from five psychological explanations (See Appendix D) were presented to students. The following illustration provides an example of a scenario presented in the PTQ:

*Athena, a 4-year old child has performed well enough on a standardized achievement test to advance to 5-year old kindergarten a year early. Could her performance be explained by:*

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ *Her parents praised her for good work.*
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ *The human species has evolved the ability to reason.*
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ *Humans have instincts to please adults.*
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ *Athena is learning to "be all she can be" even at such a young age.*
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ *She has well-developed memory and problem-solving skills.*

Each scenario is followed by five explanations representing five psychological theories.

There are a total of fifteen scenarios. Students read the scenario and explanations and



then rank-ordered the explanations from one to five (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree).

Demographic Questionnaire (DQ). This questionnaire is an information survey, or self-report, containing information about the examinee, such as ethnicity, age, religious affiliation, and previous psychology courses/training (See Appendix F).

### *Procedure*

Students were given a packet of information, including Informed Consent, Demographic Questionnaire, Human Nature Questionnaire, and the Psychological Theories Questionnaire. The students took approximately 20-40 minutes to complete the packet of information.

The examiner first explained the purpose of the research, the informed consent material, and the instructions for completing the questionnaires.

The examiner then gave each questionnaire packet a code number, and the informed consent and contact information were removed from the Demographic Questionnaire in order to facilitate anonymity. All measures used in this study can be found in the Appendices.

### *Data Analysis*

Internal reliability statistics (Cronbach's alpha) were obtained to estimate consistencies in students' responses on the HNQ and the PTQ. Correlation coefficients were obtained between students' responses on the HNQ and the PTQ. The level of significance was set at .01 in order to be conservative with the number of relationships found in this study. These correlation coefficients estimated the relationships between

psychological theorists' viewpoints on human nature and students' preferences for types of psychological explanations. As indicated in Table 1, it was hypothesized that based on students' viewpoints on human nature, they would prefer certain psychological explanations. For example, students who believe that people are generally evil, that behaviors and traits are unchangeable, that nature drives behaviors and traits, that behaviors and traits are determined by external forces, and that humanity is generally pessimistic, would prefer both evolutionary psychological explanations and Freudian explanations.

Additionally, correlation coefficients were obtained for the five dimensions in the HNQ. These correlation coefficients determined relationships between the five dimensions according to students' responses on the HNQ. For example, it was expected that students who scored high on the good dimensions would also score high on the changeable, nurture, and optimism dimensions (See Table 1).

Likewise, correlation coefficients were obtained for the psychological theories in the PTQ. These correlation coefficients determined relationships between students' preferences for psychological theories. For example, it would be expected that students who prefer Freud's theoretical explanations would also prefer the evolutionary psychological explanation (See Table 1).

## Chapter III

### Results

#### *Reliability*

Tables 2 and 3 provide the internal reliability statistics (Cronbach's alpha) for the HNQ and the PTQ. These tables indicate the tendency for participants to respond consistently to items on the HNQ and the PTQ. Table 2 provides the reliability statistics for the five dimensions included in the HNQ. Table 3 provides the reliability statistics for the psychological explanations included in the PTQ.

Nunnally (1967) suggested "in the early stages of research on predictor tests or hypothesized measures of a construct, one saves time and energy by working with instruments that have only modest reliability, for which purpose reliabilities of .60 or .50 will suffice" (p. 226). According to Nunnally, only one of the estimates in Table 2 is considered to be marginally reliable. This estimate is the pessimism/optimism dimension. This dimension indicates consistency in students' responses to the items measuring the pessimism/optimism dimension.

Likewise, as shown in Table 3, there was one marginally reliable estimate. This estimate was Freudian explanations. This psychological theory measure indicates consistency in students' responses to the items comprising Freudian explanations.



Table 2

*Consistencies in Students' Responses on the HNQ*

Human Nature Dimensions on the HNQ	Reliability Estimates
Evil/Good	.35
Unhangeable/Changeable	.20
Nurture/Nature	.21
Determinism/Freewill	.15
Pessimism/Optimism	.54

Table 3

*Consistencies in Students' Responses on the PTQ*

Psychological Theorists/Theories on the PTQ	Reliability Estimates
Skinner	.45
Evolutionary psychology	.32
Freud	.54
Maslow	.47
Kelly	.31

### *Results Showing the Correlations between the HNQ and the PTQ*

Table 4 provides the correlations between students' viewpoints on human nature (HNQ) and students' preferences for psychological explanations (PTQ). As indicated in Table 1, it would be expected that students' preferences for psychological explanations would correlate with each of the five dimensions presented. The results would have shown that students who prefer Skinnerian explanations would favor the following dimensions: determinism, the changeability of behaviors, pessimism, and nurture; the evil/good dimension would be neutral. Students who prefer Maslow's explanations would favor the following dimensions: freewill, goodness, the changeability of behaviors, optimism, and nurture. Students who prefer Freudian explanations and evolutionary psychological explanations would support the following dimensions: determinism, evilness, the unchangeability of behaviors, pessimism, and nature. Students who prefer Kelly's explanations would favor the following dimensions: determinism and the changeability of behaviors; the evil/good, pessimism/optimism and the nurture/nature dimensions would be neutral.

As presented in Table 1, it would be expected that the correlations between the human nature dimensions and the psychological explanations would be positive and significantly different from zero. No correlations would be expected for neutral responses.

Table 4 reveals one significant correlation ( $p < .01$ ). The correlation between the nurture/nature dimension and the evolutionary psychological explanations is positive and

significantly different from zero. The correlation shows that students who believe that biology and nature influence behaviors and traits prefer an evolutionary psychological explanation, supporting the hypothesis in Table 1 that students who believe in the nature dimension prefer the evolutionary psychological explanation. None of the other predicted relationships occurred.

Table 4  
*Correlations of the HNQ and the PTQ*

Psychological Explanations	Human Nature Dimensions**				
	<u>E/G</u>	<u>U/ C</u>	<u>NU/ NA</u>	<u>D/ F</u>	<u>P/ O</u>
Skinner	-.05	.07	.07	-.01	.01
Evolutionary Psychology	-.11	-.06	.26*	-.15	-.01
Freud	-.06	-.03	.11	-.04	-.14
Maslow	.07	.06	-.01	.01	-.05
Kelly	.03	.01	-.02	.02	.05

\* $p < .01$

\*\**Abbreviation Code for the Human Nature Dimensions*

E = Evil; G = Good; U = Unchangeable; C = Changeable; NU = Nurture;  
NA = Nature; D = Determinism; F = Freewill; P = Pessimism; O = Optimism



### *Relationships between the HNQ Dimensions*

Table 5 reveals the correlations between the five human nature dimensions in the HNQ. This table reveals the relationships between students' viewpoints on the five human nature dimensions on the HNQ. As shown in Table 5, there were two significant correlations found for the pessimism/optimism dimension. These significant correlations were between the pessimism/optimism dimension and the evil/good dimension and between the pessimism/optimism dimension and the determinism/freewill dimension. There is a tendency for people who are optimistic to also believe that people are generally good and to believe in freewill. Thus, this correlation found that students who have an optimistic viewpoint about humanity also believe in the goodness of human behavior, as well as in freewill. Higher scores on the items that measure the evil/good dimension and the pessimism/optimism dimension on the HNQ indicate beliefs in the good dimension and the optimism dimension (See Appendix B).

Table 5

*Correlations between the Human Nature Dimensions on the HNQ*

*Human Nature Dimensions\*\**

	<u>E/G</u>	<u>U/C</u>	<u>NU/NA</u>	<u>D/F</u>
E/G				
U/C	-.09			
NU/NA	-.08	.11		-.10
D/F	.15	.01	-.10	
P/O	.27*	-.12	-.08	.33*

\* $p < .01$

\*\* See the abbreviation code for the human nature dimensions in Table 4.

*Results of the PTQ*

Table 6 provides the correlations between the psychological explanations in the PTQ. This table reveals the relationships between students' preferences for different psychological explanations. As shown in Table 6, there were several significant correlations. For preferences for Skinnerian explanations, there were two significant correlations found, one with preferences for the evolutionary psychological explanations and one with preferences for Freudian explanations. These significant correlations showed that students who preferred Skinnerian explanations also preferred evolutionary psychological explanations and Freudian explanations. For preferences for evolutionary psychological explanations, there were two significant correlations found, one with

preferences for Freudian explanations and one with preferences for Kelly’s explanations. These correlations indicate that students who preferred evolutionary psychological explanations also preferred Freudian explanations and Kelly’s explanations. For preferences for Maslow’s explanations, two significant correlations were found, one with preferences for Freudian explanations and one with preferences for Kelly’s explanations. These correlations indicate that students who preferred Maslow’s explanations also preferred Freudian explanations and Kelly’s explanations.

Table 6  
*Correlations between the Psychological Explanations in the PTQ*

	<u>Skinner</u>	<u>Evolutionary Psychology</u>	<u>Freud</u>	<u>Maslow</u>
Skinner				
Evolutionary Psychology	.20*			
Freud	.19*	.30*		
Maslow	.10	.17	.36*	
Kelly	.07	.25*	.08	.30*

\* $p < .01$



## Chapter IV

### Discussion

#### *General Discussion and Reliability*

Little is known about students' viewpoints on human nature and their views of the similarities and differences between significant psychological theorists. Even now, with the events of 9/11 and the fight against terrorism, human nature research appears to be an issue that is rarely recognized. Psychological theorists only mention human nature indirectly in their exploration of various theories. For example, it is well understood that Freud's theory emphasizes the significance of biology in determining behavioral outcomes and that Skinner's theory recognizes the changeability of behaviors as a result of behavioral reinforcements.

If reliable measures had been obtained from the HNQ and the PTQ in this study, I would have expected that students would have preferred certain aspects of each psychological explanation. I would have expected that students would have selected certain pieces from each explanation that tie into their own perceptions on human nature. I would have expected a more eclectic viewpoint on both human nature and psychological theory preferences due to the general psychology content learned in the course. It is assumed that most people believe certain pieces of various

theoretical orientations to be true, such as believing portions of Skinner's reinforcement patterns and portions of the humanistic emphasis on the influences of unconditional/conditional love on behavior and self-esteem. Therefore, it seems unlikely that students would view human nature to be exactly the same on each dimension as indicated in one psychological theory.

### *Results Obtained in this Study*

This study shows a relationship between students' viewpoint on the nurture/nature dimension and students' preference for the evolutionary psychological explanation. This finding suggests that students who favor a nature viewpoint on the nurture/nature dimension prefer the evolutionary psychological explanation. As shown in Table 1, it was hypothesized that students who favor the nature dimension would prefer the evolutionary psychological explanation. The nature dimension assumes that biology and genes program behaviors and traits. The evolutionary psychological theory also emphasizes that human behaviors are shaped by biology, indicating that human beings are under the control of genetic influences (Lickliter & Honeycutt, 2003; Nisbett, 1990). Therefore, this relationship between the nature dimension and the evolutionary psychological theory would be expected.

This study also shows two significant correlations on the human nature dimensions in the HNQ. One relationship is between the evil/good dimension and the pessimism/optimism dimension. This relationship shows that students who believe humans are naturally good also have an optimistic viewpoint about humanity. Table 1 shows that both the good dimension and the optimism dimension apply to Maslow's



explanations. Maslow's theory emphasizes the importance of opportunities and experiences that lead to personal growth, or living up to one's potential. This personal growth moves a person in the direction of self-actualization, which involves self-acceptance, appreciation, and respect for the environment and for other human beings (Carver & Scheier, 2000). Such ideas present an optimistic, positive outlook about humanity. Thus, this relationship would be expected since goodness is often associated with optimistic thinking.

The other significant correlation found on the HNQ is between the pessimism/optimism dimension and the determinism/freewill dimension. This relationship shows that students who have an optimistic viewpoint about humanity also believe in freewill. Table 1 shows that both optimism and freewill are core assumptions about human nature in Maslow's explanations. As stated above, Maslow's theory supports beliefs in humanity's ability to reach self-actualization, which supports optimism and presents hope for human beings. Similarly, Maslow's theory assumes that people have freedom to choose their behaviors and traits, meaning their actions are the result of their own internal forces. This idea presents an optimistic viewpoint on human nature. Thus, this positive relationship between optimism and freewill would be expected.

This study also shows relationships between psychological explanations in the PTQ. Preferences for Skinnerian explanations show two significant relationships, between Skinnerian explanations and evolutionary psychological explanations and between Skinnerian explanations and Freudian explanations. This finding suggests that students who prefer Skinnerian explanations also prefer evolutionary psychological



explanations and Freudian explanations. As indicated in Table 1, the evolutionary psychological explanations and Freudian explanations assume the same human nature dimensions. Skinnerian explanations, evolutionary psychological explanations, and Freudian explanations have only the determinism viewpoint in common. As previously stated, Skinner's theory assumes that human behavior is controlled by reinforcement patterns, indicating that behaviors and traits have the ability to change. These reinforcement patterns also support a nurture viewpoint because these reinforcements come from the environment. The idea that behaviors can change supports an optimistic viewpoint in that negative behaviors can be changed into positive ones. Because Skinner's theory presents behaviors as controlled by environmental reinforcements, his theory advocates a deterministic viewpoint. Similarly, evolutionary psychological theory and Freud's theory support a deterministic viewpoint, in that behaviors and traits are determined by genes and biology. As stated above, the evolutionary psychological theory and Freud's theory differ from Skinner's theory on each of the other four human nature dimensions. The evolutionary psychological theory and Freud's theory support the idea that human behaviors are driven by genetic and biological desires, these theories assume an evil viewpoint on human nature. Because these theories emphasize that biological and sexual drives control behaviors, the evolutionary psychological theory and Freud's theory assume that behaviors are unchangeable. These nature or biological viewpoints and the ideas that behaviors are unchangeable assume pessimism because behaviors are fixed. Because of much dissimilarity between Skinner's theory and the evolutionary psychological theory and between Skinner's theory and Freud's theory, positive

relationships between preferences for Skinnerian explanations, evolutionary psychological explanations, and Freudian explanations would not be expected.

This study also shows two additional significant relationships for preferences for evolutionary psychological explanations. These relationships are shown between evolutionary psychological explanations and Freudian explanations and between evolutionary psychological explanations and Kelly's explanations. As indicated in Table 1, both the evolutionary psychological explanations and Freudian explanations assume the same viewpoints on each human nature dimension. As stated above, these theories emphasize that biological drives shape human behavior, making human behaviors appear selfish, evil, unchangeable, controlled by biology, and pessimistic. Thus, it would be expected that preferences for evolutionary psychological explanations and Freudian explanations would show a positive relationship.

However, as shown in Table 1, preferences for Freudian explanations and Kelly's explanations have only the determinism viewpoint in common. As stated above, Freud's theory advocates that human beings are driven by their biological needs. Kelly's theory advocates that humans can create their own ideas about experiences through the personal constructs they build about various situations and events (Carver & Scheier, 2000). However, Kelly's theory also emphasizes that circumstances cannot always be controlled due to external forces (Kelly, 1970). Because Freud's theory and Kelly's theory share in only one dimension, a relationship between these two theories would not be expected.

Two significant relationships were also found for preferences for Maslow's explanations. These correlations are between Maslow's explanations and Freudian



explanations and between Maslow's explanations and Kelly's explanations. As shown in Table 1, Maslow's explanations and Freudian explanations have no human nature dimensions in common. As stated above, Maslow's theory emphasizes human potential for self-actualization, indicating that human beings strive for growth and goodness, that behaviors are dynamic, and that individuals have freedom to choose their behaviors and traits. Maslow's theory emphasizes optimism, presenting a positive viewpoint on human ability. As stated above, Freud's theory emphasizes biological and sexual drives, indicating that human beings are driven to reproduce and act on sexual and aggressive urges, making human behavior appear selfish and determined by genes. Such an outlook emphasizes pessimism, presenting a negative outlook about humanity. Thus, it would not be expected that a positive relationship would exist between Maslow's explanations and Freudian explanations. It would not be expected that students who prefer Maslow's explanations would also prefer Freudian explanations.

As indicated in Table 1, preferences for Maslow's explanations and Kelly's explanations share only in the changeable dimension. As stated above, Maslow's theory assumes that human beings have the freedom to grow and become the best individual they can be. As stated previously, Maslow's theory also assumes that people are generally good and that the environment can facilitate the personal growth process, indicating an optimistic viewpoint about humanity. As stated previously, Kelly's theory assumes that people create the world in which they live through personal constructs that can be altered and improved through various experiences. Kelly's theory emphasizes that human behavior is controlled by the personal constructs people build regarding certain



situations and events. However, Kelly's theory provides little insight into the evil/good dimension, the nurture/nature dimension, or the pessimism/optimism dimension.

Because Maslow's explanations and Kelly's explanations share in only the changeable dimension, a positive relationship would not be expected between these explanations. It would not be expected that students who prefer Maslow's explanations would also prefer Kelly's explanations.

### *Methodological Limitations*

The questionnaires used in this study were created as a result of research in the areas of the five dimensions presented and the examination of the five psychological theories presented. In order for accurate interpretations to be made, all the dimensions on the HNQ and the PTQ would need to be reliable. Measures for improving the reliability of this study will be discussed below.

Another methodological limitation includes lack of student motivation. Students were required as part of their coursework in General Psychology to earn three research credits throughout the semester. This particular study was worth two research credits for students who engaged in the study. Most participants also were allowed to complete their credits during the last hour segment of their classroom period. As a result of completing the questionnaires during a class meeting, students appeared to complete the questionnaires hurriedly, marking answers quickly without much consideration for the content. Although they were allowed 45-60 minutes to complete all questionnaires, most students who participated in this study completed the questionnaires within a 20 minute

time period. It seems as if students showed little interest in focusing on the individual items on the questionnaires.

Furthermore, the numbers of questions appear to have presented a problem with the methodology of this study. The HNQ presented 40 items. The PTQ presented 15 scenarios with five explanations for each scenario. When receiving the questionnaires, participants looked exasperated at the number of questions. The number of questions may have prevented participants from contemplating each question thoroughly, forcing them to omit questions or misread them. Students with reading difficulties may not have understood the questions or may have taken more time to answer each question, causing them to leave some items blank.

A further limitation involves some of the items on the questionnaires. Some of the items used in both questionnaires could have been misinterpreted. For example, item number 5 on the HNQ, "I avoid conflict" may have been tricky for participants to rate because of its ambiguity. The question was intended to measure one's perception on the unchangeable/changeable dimension, on whether arguments between people can be changed into a positive outcome. A rewording of this item, such as in "The outcomes of arguments can change from negative to positive," may have reduced any misinterpretations that may have occurred.

Likewise, on item number 14 on the HNQ, explanations "a" and "d" may have been interpreted as very similar, leading to the same ratings. The key word in explanation "a" was the term "wants," implying a more humanistic rationalization, while



the chief word in explanation “d” was “understanding,” implying a more cognitive perspective. Similar misinterpretations may have occurred with other items, as well.

#### *Improvement Possibilities for Future Research with this Study*

Several improvements could be made with this study. These improvements include the implementation of a pilot study, better questionnaire administration, and fewer items on each questionnaire. These are discussed below in more detail.

One improvement in this study involves reliability. Only one measure on the HNQ and one measure on the PTQ were shown to be marginally reliable. One way in which reliability could be substantiated is through a pilot study. Perhaps conducting a pilot study using both professors and students as participants would be helpful in improving response consistency and in reducing the number of items on each questionnaire.

Another improvement that could be made is in the questionnaire administration. Students were allowed to complete the questionnaires in their General Psychology course during a class meeting. Students were allowed to leave the classroom once they completed their questionnaires. Observing other students leaving the classroom appeared to increase anxiety in other participants. If students turned in their completed questionnaires at the end of their class meeting, students may have placed more thought into each question.

The number of items on the questionnaires presents another concern. The HNQ and the PTQ contained a combined total of 55 questions, in addition to the rank-ordering of the five explanations for each of the PTQ items. This many questions on the PTQ may



have appeared overwhelming to participants who had only a short period of time to complete them. Perhaps fewer questions on the PTQ could have enabled participants to process the questions more accurately. Fewer questions may have decreased the sense of anxiety and nervousness that appeared to be prevalent during the administration of these questionnaires.

As a result of these limitations in methodology, no conclusive results can be obtained from this study. The results of this study do not significantly support the hypotheses predicted in Table 1.

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## Appendices



## Appendix A

### Human Nature Questionnaire

How strongly do you agree with the following statements? Circle the following statements from 1 to 5 according to the following:

- 1 Strongly  
Disagree (SD)  
2 Disagree (D)  
3 Neutral (N)  
4 Agree (A)  
5 Strongly  
Agree(SA)

<u>Questions</u>	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. Most people help if given the opportunity.	1	2	3	4	5
2. What I do is largely the product of the situations I am in.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I tend to help others because someday I may need their help.	1	2	3	4	5
4. People tend to imitate more popular, successful individuals.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I avoid conflict.	1	2	3	4	5
6. People generally do what they want without regard to the welfare of others.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Most of my desires are driven by my biological needs.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My personality is a result of the genes I received from my parents.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Most people live up to their fullest potential, becoming who they believe they were meant to be.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I tend to focus on what is important and meaningful rather than on things that do not matter.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Everyone is free to choose his/her own destiny.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The way we think about events that happen in our world (e.g. wars) is determined by what we hear from others (e.g. media, friends, family).	1	2	3	4	5

13.	It's rare to find a person with a positive self-image.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I can be phony in my attitudes towards others (e.g. pretending to like someone whom I do not find likeable).	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Most everyone stands up for what he/she believes.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Our personality characteristics are inherited from our parents.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I tend to change my behavior when people do not like it.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	My parents raised me in a way similar to the way they were raised.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	I find being nice to other people emotionally rewarding.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Human beings tend to want their own space and they defend it.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I tend to be competitive in order to get what I need for survival.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Most students who perform poorly in school are doing the best they can.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	It is hard to be around people who often say negative things about everyone.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	People avoid acts that would harm other people.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	Typically, I am genuinely concerned about the emotional and physical welfare of others.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	People avoid engaging in activities that cause them pain and guilt.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	I put myself down quite often.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	Humans are controlled by the environment.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	I have little control over my thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	I have learned through experience not to trust another person.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	People accept themselves for who they are.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	If you want to survive in this world, you have to look out for number 1.	1	2	3	4	5
33.	I believe that people can change their personality.	1	2	3	4	5
34.	People learn from the consequences of their actions.	1	2	3	4	5
35.	I often do whatever I want to, without considering the consequences.	1	2	3	4	5
36.	I act in certain ways to receive attention.	1	2	3	4	5
37.	Most people occasionally think "I'm stupid," or "I deserved to be punished because I'm worthless."	1	2	3	4	5
38.	I believe that people can change their behaviors.	1	2	3	4	5
39.	People tend to believe that they control their own behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
40.	I frequently try to change my positive thoughts into negative ones.	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix B

### Human Nature Questionnaire Score Sheet

<u>Question Number</u>	<u>Human Nature Dimension Measured</u>
1	Good
2	Changeable
3	Evil
4	Nurture
5	Unchangeable
6	Evil
7	Nature
8	Nature
9	Freewill
10	Freewill
11	Freewill
12	Determinism
13	Pessimist
14	Changeable
15	Good
16	Nature
17	Changeable
18	Nurture
19	Good
20	Nature
21	Nature
22	Optimist
23	Optimist
24	Good
25	Good
26	Unchangeable
27	Pessimist
28	Determinism
29	Determinism
30	Pessimist
31	Optimist
32	Nature



33	Changeable
34	Changeable
35	Freewill
36	Evil
37	Pessimist
38	Changeable
39	Freewill
40	Pessimist

## Appendix C

### Psychological Theories Questionnaire

#### Scenarios: Explanations for Behaviors

##### Directions:

Presented below are scenarios about particular behaviors that individuals may perform. Underneath these scenarios are five different explanations for the behavior presented in the scenario. Indicate the explanation that you agree with most strongly according to the following:

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

1. Athena, a 4-year old child has performed well enough on a standardized achievement test to advance to 5-year old kindergarten a year early. Could her performance be explained by:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Her parents praised her for good work.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ The human species has evolved the ability to reason.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Humans have instincts to please adults
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Athena is learning to "be all she can be" even at such a young age
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ She has well-developed memory and problem-solving skills.

2. Triton, a college freshman, steals a candy bar from a classmate's book bag. Could he have stolen the candy bar because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Triton is generally a good guy, and in this incident he slipped up.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Triton looks out for his own survival without considering others.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Triton learned from friends that stealing is okay if it is only a small item.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Triton has feelings of inadequacy and stealing makes him feel more powerful.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ He has a poor understanding of right and wrong.

**Directions:**

Presented below are scenarios about particular behaviors that individuals may perform. Underneath these scenarios are five different explanations for the behavior presented in the scenario. Indicate the explanation that you agree with most strongly according to the following:

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

3. Socrates, an 11-month baby, is learning to walk. He stands up for a minute, takes a step, and falls down, crawling around on the floor for a while. However, he gets back up and tries again to take a step. The baby attempts to try and walk again because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ His parents are encouraging Socrates to get up and try again.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Human babies are biologically programmed to motor walking.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Babies have unconscious needs to be successful.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ The baby is developing his fullest potential.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ The baby's thinking processes are developing, which is reflected through his behavior.

4. Lydia, a two-year old girl, communicates to her parents and other individuals in complete sentences, such as "Mommy I want food." Lydia could speak in sentences because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Her parents worked with her very often, teaching her to pronounce letters and syllables, as well as words.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Changes in language are an innate part of her humanity.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Lydia depends upon her parents and her communication pleases them.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Lydia is trying to establish her own identity and communication is part of that.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ As Lydia matures, she is developing her own thought processes and communicating those cognitions through language.

5. Hera, a two-year old girl, pops open the childproof latches on one of the cabinet doors in the kitchen. She gets out a pan and hands it to her mother. Hera may have figured out how to pop open the childproof latch because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ She wants to be free from parental authority and grow in identifying her role as an individual.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ She is a problem-solver.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ She needs pleasure from parental affection and acts in ways to get it.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ She imitates her parents who open the latch.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Children have a natural predisposition to get into things.



**Directions:**

Presented below are scenarios about particular behaviors that individuals may perform. Underneath these scenarios are five different explanations for the behavior presented in the scenario. Indicate the explanation that you agree with most strongly according to the following:

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
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- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

6. Diana, an 82-year old lady, lives in a retirement home. Diana is very grumpy and constantly complains of aches and pains that the doctors cannot understand. She has no friends because of her negative attitude, none of the nurses like her, and her children rarely visit her. When anyone is friendly to her, she tries to hit them with her cane. Her behavior could be explained by:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ She interprets others' actions as meant to harm her.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ In her past, she has always received what she wanted.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ She does not communicate her desire for companionship.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ She releases energy and tension in socially unacceptable ways.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ She has inherited a depressive disorder from her parents.

7. Jupiter is a 17-year old high school male. He has decided not to attend college upon graduating from high school. He has always hated schoolwork, often complaining about assignments that are due and refusing to study for tests. He prefers physical work to academics. Jupiter's dislike of and refusal to attend college could be explained because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Making money seems to be a greater reward right now.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ His understanding of college is that it is a place for people who are afraid of the real world.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ He wants to create a sense of mastery and build his esteem through immediately establishing a living for himself.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ He is ready to work for resources that would support himself and a family.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ He can take out his own personal anxieties through physical labor in his job.

**Directions:**

Presented below are scenarios about particular behaviors that individuals may perform. Underneath these scenarios are five different explanations for the behavior presented in the scenario. Indicate the explanation that you agree with most strongly according to the following:

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
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- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

8. Aphrodite owns three small, privately-owned clothing department stores. She invites all of her employees from all three stores to a luncheon at an exclusive country club. The employees are served with fine wines, breads, and entrees. Aphrodite provides such a luncheon because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Humans have a natural tendency to provide their group or family with the best they can offer.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ She really does not like her employees, but she is compensating by offering them something nice.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ She receives excellent work from her employees when she offers them rewards.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ She is a good person who wants to make her employees feel comfortable and appreciated.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Her idea of being a boss is to provide her employees with new experiences.

9. Pluto is a high school geology/biology teacher who enjoys teaching his students about life. Most of the time his students are outdoors in nature, studying various plants, rocks, and wildlife. Pluto helps his students learn about nature because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ He has received a lot of feedback for doing so.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Doing so creates more meaningful and positive relationships with his students.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ He feels more adequate when dealing with the immoral world.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ He thinks hands-on activities will make his students remember concepts better.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Adults have natural tendencies to help younger individuals, those for whom they are responsible.



**Directions:**

Presented below are scenarios about particular behaviors that individuals may perform. Underneath these scenarios are five different explanations for the behavior presented in the scenario. Indicate the explanation that you agree with most strongly according to the following:

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

10. Venus cannot seem to establish a long-term relationship with a man. She is initially very clingy and dependent, but later on she gets upset with the guy for lacking emotional support and is not satisfied with anything he does. However, she still wants that closeness with him, but she breaks up with him instead. Venus' pattern of emotions in relationships that results in breakups occurs because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ She experiences both sexual feelings and aggressive feelings toward him.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ In her past relationships, the man has dumped her, causing her heartache, which she does not want to experience again.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Her concept of men is that they like challenges.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ She realizes she is not the person she knows she is capable of being; she is not happy with herself, and she does not want to make anyone else miserable either.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Females tend to lose interest in males who do not provide protection and support (in this case emotional) for them and their offspring.

11. Dionysius, a 20-year old college female, drinks heavily at parties and has a few drinks a day, as well. When her friends confront her with her drinking problem, she becomes offended and denies having one. Dionysius' denial results from:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Her amount of alcohol consumption does not fit her perspective on what it means to have a drinking problem.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Having a genetic predisposition to alcohol abuse.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Drinking so often that it is a routine for her, making her feel better after a long day.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Shifting her tension and stress to drinking.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Not seeing how drinking will keep her from ultimate success.



**Directions:**

Presented below are scenarios about particular behaviors that individuals may perform. Underneath these scenarios are five different explanations for the behavior presented in the scenario. Indicate the explanation that you agree with most strongly according to the following:

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
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- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

12. Odysseus, a 17-year old high school male, has packed the same lunch since he started packing his own lunch in his first year in middle school. He has always enjoyed a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, one apple, a can of juice, two carrots, two celery stalks, and one small bowl of peaches. Odysseus' lunch-packing pattern can be explained by:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Imitating the lunch his mother used to pack when he was a child.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Thinking what he packs is a typical lunch.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Having a natural tendency to follow a routine.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Having a good relationship with his mother.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Wanting to be as healthy as he can and to be a good influence on healthy eating for his friends.

13. Helen cannot decide on a major. She chooses one major and switches to another major. This indecision in choosing a college major results because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ She is unconsciously not wanting to make a mistake her parents would not approve.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ She is looking for a choice that will give her long-term success.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ She does not yet know enough about the options to make an informed decision.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ She receives a lot of attention from counselors, teacher, and friends about indecisiveness.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ She believes that anything she takes will make her a better person.

**Directions:**

Presented below are scenarios about particular behaviors that individuals may perform. Underneath these scenarios are five different explanations for the behavior presented in the scenario. Indicate the explanation that you agree with most strongly according to the following:

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

14. Doris compliments people as much as possible, often commenting on great work performance, on their appearance, or on something new that they have purchased. She compliments people because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ She is a genuine person who wants to build individuals' self-esteem.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ She finds pleasure in reflecting the positive relationship she had with her parents.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Her parents have taught her to be courteous, polite, and kind to everyone.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Her understanding of what it means to be a genuine person includes complimenting others on their good qualities.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ It is natural to "grease the social wheels" by being nice to others.

15. Tethys is currently a stay-at-home mom, yet she wants to go back to work. She has already applied to a job and been hired. She has decided to go back to work because:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ She can best help her family's needs by providing resources.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ She understands motherhood to include working a job and taking care of the family.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Her mother and grandmother set an example for her, which included working while maintaining a family.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ She feels inadequate when not providing resources for her family.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ She is an individual striving to succeed in every aspect.



## Appendix D

### Psychological Theories Questionnaire Score Sheet

1. Athena, a 4-year old child has performed well enough on a standardized achievement test to advance to 5-year old kindergarten a year early. Could her performance be explained by:
  - a. (Skinner) Her parents praised her for good work.
  - b. (EP) The human species has evolved the ability to reason.
  - c. (Freud) Humans have instincts to please adults.
  - d. (Maslow) Athena is learning to "be all she can be" even at such a young age.
  - e. (Kelly) She has well-developed memory and problem-solving skills.
2. Triton, a college freshmen, steals a candy bar from a classmate's book bag. Could he have stolen the candy bar because:
  - a. (Maslow) Triton is generally a good guy, and in this incident he slipped up.
  - b. (EP) Triton looks out for his own survival without considering others.
  - c. (Skinner) Triton learned from friends that stealing is okay if it is only a small item.
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3. Socrates, an 11-month baby is learning to walk. He stands up for a minute, takes a step, and falls down, crawling around on the floor for a while. However, he gets back up and tries again to take a step. The baby attempts to try and walk again because:
  - a. (Skinner) His parents are encouraging Socrates to get up and try again
  - b. (EP) Human babies are biologically programmed to motor walking.
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  - e. (Kelly) The baby's thinking processes are developing, which is reflected through his behavior.



4. Lydia, a two-year old girl, communicates to her parents and other individuals in complete sentences, such as "Mommy I want food." Lydia could speak in sentences because:

- a. (Skinner) Her parents worked with her very often, teaching her to pronounce letters and syllables, as well as words.
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- a. (EP) She can best help her family's needs by providing resources.
- b. (Kelly) She understands motherhood to include working a job and taking care of the family.
- c. (Skinner) Her mother and grandmother set an example for her, which included working while maintaining a family.
- d. (Freud) She feels inadequate when not providing resources for her family.
- e. (Maslow) She is an individual striving to succeed in every aspect.

## Appendix E

### **Informed Consent Form**

#### **What is the purpose of this research?**

“Human nature” is a phrase that most people loosely use to describe the reasons individuals perform various behaviors. The purpose of this research is to determine the way in which participants think about human nature and explanations for human behavior. You will receive two research credits for completing this study, one for the initial surveys and one for the surveys conducted at the end of the fall semester. This information will also help determine if the participants’ viewpoints on human nature change as a result of learning about psychological theories throughout their first semester in introductory psychology classes.

#### **What will be expected of me?**

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire and a scenario form. The questionnaire is related to attitudes about human nature and the other concerns general explanations for why people perform certain behaviors.

#### **How long will the research take?**

It will take about one hour for both forms.

#### **Will my answers be anonymous?**

Yes. Your name will not be used at all in the research. You will not put your name on the questionnaire or the scenario, and the researchers will not know how you answered the questions.

#### **Can I withdraw from the study if I decide to?**

Absolutely. You can withdraw from the research at any time and ask that your answers not be used.

**Is there any harm that I might experience from taking part in the study?**

No. There is no foreseeable harm to the participants.

**How will I benefit from taking part in the research?**

You will be satisfied in knowing that you participated in a study about why humans engage in certain behaviors. In addition, I will send you a copy of the results. Indicate your interest by writing your name, address, and e-mail on the back of this form.

**Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns about the research?**

Contact me (Krysta Webster) at the Department of Psychology, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC 28723 (Office # 342). You can also contact Dr. Bruce Henderson, Chair, Psychology Department at the same address (828-227-3784).

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix F

### Demographic Questionnaire

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Male    Female

Psychology 150 class session # \_\_\_\_\_

Psychology 150 class instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Hometown \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Religious affiliation:

none

Catholic

Protestant: Denomination \_\_\_\_\_

Buddhist

Hindu

Muslim

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated major \_\_\_\_\_

Have you had any previous psychology classes? Yes      No

If yes, briefly describe the class(es) below, including topics covered (e.g. memory):